

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Public Policy (ICPP3) June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore

## Panel T01 P06 Session 1

Designing Policy Mixes for Sustainable Socio-technical Transitions

# Title of the paper

Connecting Policy for a Low Carbon Future: The Possibilities of Design,
Discourse and Deliberation

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# **Date of presentation**

Wednesday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00

# Connecting Policy for a Low Carbon Future: The Possibilities of Design, Discourse and Deliberation

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#### Abstract

The necessity of moving towards a low-carbon society is recognised at the international level by organisations ranging from the EU and the OECD to the UN; yet national policy makers in Australia have struggled to develop integrated policy solutions. As such, a crucial research question is how do we institutionalise a coordinated transition to a low-carbon society? In this paper the goal is to explore the ways in which social policy and environmental policy solutions to the low-carbon issue might be better integrated in the Australian context. The paper has three components. First, it problematizes the issue of social and environmental integration. Second, it sets out the research design and theoretical orientations of an interdisciplinary project, sponsored by the Australian Research Council, which is examining the possibilities of social and environmental integration through a number of different lenses. Third, it drills down into one of aspect of the project's design – the analysis of policy discourse at the national policy level – in order to present findings about the integrative (and disintegrative) possibilities of policy framing and political communication in relation to Australia's National Electricity Market and its Renewable Energy Targets.

#### The Problem

Research addressing how carbon intensive societies can be transformed is predominantly located within the physical sciences and, as such, the role that social policy and can play in the necessary transition to a low-carbon future has been largely ignored (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Urry, 2011). Moreover, social and political institutions have a now long-standing tendency to compartmentalise the low-carbon challenge. Welfare state sustainability, for example, remains a question for economic policy, yet ecological sustainability falls under the remit of environmental policy, and is detached from other policy fields (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Indeed, the limited nature of policy coordination in terms of low-carbon adaptation is now recognised by bodies such as The World Health Organisation (2011: 9), which has warned that:

The current climate change discourse – including the way mitigation and adaptation measures are designed and appraised – tends to emphasize environmental, economic or technological inputs and costs. The social dimensions of climate change are not well understood or addressed. As a result, current policy responses may not fully address the negative impacts nor do they take full advantage of potential opportunities to reach a number of sustainable development goals.

This compartmentalised policy context has meant that social-welfare dynamics, which are crucial to the realisation of a low-carbon future, have been neglected in research terms and underplayed in mainstream climate change debates. This is problematic for two reasons. First, because the unprecedented success of western welfare states and the concomitant post-war growth they encouraged helped to create unprecedented levels of consumption, global warming and new types of risk in contemporary societies (Beck 1992). Second, and more importantly in the context of this paper, is that high carbon lives are embedded in dominant cultural patterns and supported by social institutions and associated social policies. Thus we need to bring the 'social' into an examination of the functioning and consequences of a high carbon society, as well as the role of specific institutions in developing viable low-carbon alternatives (Urry 2011).

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What is also clear is that existing social policy settings are insufficient. Compensatory policies, such as the utility bill subsidies for low-income groups that are now being used in countries like Australia and the UK, are an ineffective solution because they are difficult to target and lack dedicated revenue streams, making them vulnerable to government budget cuts (Gough, 2011). Market based risk management strategies, such as insurance products, can also exacerbate inequalities because of the rising costs of insurance premiums pricing out low-income households. And mainstream green marketing solutions (such as the alternative energy industry) often only reach the wealthiest 20% of residents (Ross, 2011). Inequitable outcomes of this nature are likely to be exacerbated, moreover, as traditional social policies, relating to public housing, public health and income support, for example, face increasing fiscal competition from prioritized environmental policies, such as flood and drought management and recovery, which are both relevant in the Australian context. This resource competition is likely to be aggravated through the implementation of carbon budgets or higher carbon taxes used to stabilise carbon emissions. Hence exploring these policy tensions, and understanding how they can be reconciled, is an increasingly important task if social policy is to be genuinely weaved into efforts to create sustainable human development (Gough, 2011). However, like the challenge itself, research into this problem also needs to be interdisciplinary so that it too can integrate the multiple perspectives required to tackle the issue.

#### The Project

In response to the challenge set out above we are examining integration across a number of different sites via a multi-method research design, which is being funded by the Australian Research Council. The design consists of four streams of analysis.

## Stream 1 - Identifying Synergies through Cross-national Comparison

National policymaking does not take place in a vacuum and other levels of governance (regional and global) represent important contextual factors. Thus we are seeking to understand different welfare state designs - in Sweden, Norway, Australia, Germany and the UK - in order to develop an understanding of potential public policy synergies that might connect social and environmental objectives at the macro-economic level. These countries have been chosen because they represent different types in the traditional welfare regime continuum (Esping-Andersen, 2002) and because they are also countries that have pursued aggressive and binding carbon emission reduction targets. This characteristic that makes them similar; what makes them different are their welfare regimes, systems of government, rates of income inequality and degree of marketstate coordination. In this regard, we anticipate that the so called 'liberal welfare states' (Esping-Andersen, 2002), such as the UK and Australia are more likely to experience goal conflict because of strong market interests defending existing modes of production and consumption (Koch, 2012). Whereas countries such as Sweden, Germany and Norway that have coordinated market economies are likely to be better placed to manage the intersection of social policy and environmental adaptation because they have adopted a more integrated and regulated approach to state-market relations (Dryzek et al. 2003; Koch 2012). Ultimately, this analysis present holistic country case studies on different forms of political economy and their effects on social and environmental policy synergy.

#### Stream 2 - Identifying Synergies through Policy Frame Analysis

Moving to the national level of political economy requires attention to how social and climate problems, and responses to both, have been framed and counter-framed in domestic policies. Here it is difficult to overstate the importance of politics and political framing because of the controversy surrounding national carbon emission reduction targets and schemes in Australia. Nevertheless, mapping dominant policy discourses and their effects helps us to understand the integration of social and technical policy systems by uncovering connective and dis-connective narratives which can either bridge or break the attachments between environment and social policy. In this regard we are specifically interested in the efficacy of communication

and the ways in which the structuring of discourse through 'storylines' and 'discourse coalitions' can influence the institutionalisation of environmental policy (Hajer 2006).

There are a number of challenges that any integrating discourse needs to overcome. Framing climate change, for example, as 'a risk on the horizon', or as a result of human greed and sin does not provide a sufficient motivation for action and institutional transformation (Charlton 2009). Moreover, it appears that climate change science, in itself, is not strong enough to penetrate the cognitive dissonance created by attachment to social group, ideology or political party (Whitmarsh and O'Neill 2010; Kahan *et al.* 2012; Unsworth and Fielding 2014) and that environmental concepts, such as sustainability and ecological modernization, are often appropriated as market discourses in which the environmental is rarely foregrounded (Behringer, 2010). These are the well-known negatives around climate change discourse but there are of course some discursive success stories around the integration of an environmental agenda. The initial success of the global warming narrative (Behringer, 2010); the framing of an ozone layer 'hole' and the impact that had on the coordination of the Montreal Protocol (Litfin 1994; Dryzek 2010); the institutionalisation of the concept of Environmental Protection Integration (EPI) into the European Union as a means of balancing social, economic and environmental objectives (Lafferty and Hovden 2003; Jordan and Lenschow 2010). These all suggest that discourse has the power to integrate.

In this sense we are examining a range of cases of policy change: the creation and the retrenchment of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA); the creation of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, and; the 2016 renewable energy 'crisis'. In each case study we draw on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Bacchi (2009), Wodak (2011) and Hajer (1997; 2006) – all critical discourse analysts – in order to understand the dominant discourses at work at the national policy level, the subjugated and alternative discourses that are struggling to be heard, the manner in which climate and social concerns are problematized and, most importantly, the possibilities for integration that we see within these framings. This discourse analysis is being complemented by interviews with policy officials across Australian Governments who will help us ascertain how these policy actors frame the opportunities and barriers to integration themselves and also how they perceive external frames that are produced by non-government actors.

## Stream 3 – Identifying Synergies through Policy Design

It has now become fashionable to discuss the formulation of policy in terms of policy design (Howlett 2010). At the heart of the design concept is an appreciation that 'mixes' of policy tools will be required and, moreover, that these mixes need to operate in complex governance environments (Howlett and Rayner 2007; Howlett 2009). In order to examine policy design mixes in relation to the social and environmental nexus this project is examining one specific policy – Transport Orientated Development (TOD) – as a case study of policy design in which integration is crucial to the selection of appropriate policy tools. In this regard we hypothesis that urban planning policy has an integrative capacity through which the social and the environmental can be joined.

Cities around the world have attempted to respond to the challenge of creating sustainable settlements by integrating TOD into their planning policies. Their aim is to reduce car dependence whilst increasing public transport uptake and to offer co-located access to social and affordable housing stock (Shyr et al, 2010). It is clearly a policy with the potential to integrate the social and the environmental. Housing provision, planning regulations and access to transport are central elements of social policy and planning, with clear linkages to both climate change adaptation and mitigation and social integration. High density settlement patterns, such as TOD, generate more passengers to support frequent transit services which increase the liveliness of a place (Lin and Gau, 2006). Mixed land uses in station areas provide opportunities for people to live closer to their employment and opportunities for employment, a key area of social policy. In addition, transit supported uses (e.g. shops) are high pedestrian generators that directly promote greater transit

ridership and provide opportunities for multi-purpose trips (Cervero, 1996). Street connectivity facilitates walking by reducing walking time from transit stops to opportunities (destinations) or between opportunities. As a result, a combination of this flexibility (walkability and frequency) and speed of public transport services in a TOD makes it a logical competitor of private transport (Bertolini *et al.* 2009). A station is developed not just to catch the transit services, but is created as a place to live, to work, to shop, to socialize and to recreate (Kamruzzaman *et al.* 2013).

In Australia, all of the capital cities have included TOD as part of their city plans and transit policies. However, despite the investment around TODs in Australia, private car dependency remains a critical problem that creates road congestion and escalating emissions. In addition, poor use of public transport results in a spiralling problem of increased fees as user demand is not financially sufficient to support the capital costs. If we are to understand TOD as a means to increase the overall environmental sustainability and equity within an urban landscape, it becomes essential to interrogate existing planning policies both horizontally and vertically (across all 3 levels of Australian government) to address the present undesirable spatial outcome that leads to social segregation.

For this reason this stream of analysis is exploring how the policy design process might re-orientate TOD policy in order to accommodate more effective and equitable urban settlement, improved public and environmentally friendly transit that is affordable for all citizens, and associated reductions in carbon emissions. The research is investigating 3 capital cities that have active TOD policy: Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney. Each city has a unique policy framework that outlines TOD development guidelines and principles. The analysis will first define each case study in terms of the synthesis of land use planning legislation and guidelines, outlining public and active transit policies compared to those focused on private automobile use. The wide range of incentives and disincentives for each type of transit will be compared and TOD formulation and morphology will be assessed to evaluate the land use mixes, affordable housing, and other characteristics (such as park and ride, adjacent land uses). The case studies will each involve a series of interviews of senior urban and transport planners, transport engineers, councillors, and govt. agencies. Finally, two resident focus groups will be conducted within TOD areas in each of the case studies to ascertain user attitudes of TODs as an urban form for sustainable transport.

### Stream 4 – Identifying Synergy through Citizen Participation and Deliberation

The final stream in the research design will use deliberative and participatory mechanisms to bring together policy experts and citizens to engage in debate about the legitimacy and efficacy of those lessons that have been drawn from Streams 1, 2 and 3 above. From the comparative welfare state design stream, for example, questions will be generated about social policies used elsewhere and their potential to be adopted in Australia, such as basic income proposals, birth licenses, social housing and green job employment strategies. There will also be competing environmental and sustainability policy narratives to be deliberated upon, ranging from climate change scepticism to 'no growth' and 'slow growth' scenarios and what each of these mean for production and consumption expectations, leisure activities, work and travel. From the TOD planning case study, deliberative topics are likely to relate to competing policies around automobile dependency and active public transport, where contradictions continue to play out in the urban environment. And from our study of discourse we will have findings about different forms of political communication and their potential to influence behaviour and public opinion. We want to examine all of these findings through the lens of the citizen to explore their legitimacy.

At the global, national, sub-national and local levels of governance, policymakers, faced with increasing public apathy and waning levels of institutional trust, are increasingly endorsing participatory and deliberative processes as a means of incorporating citizen views (Davidson *et al.* 2011). This is because policy decisions which emanate from inclusive, reasoned discussions are said to be better informed, more public-

oriented and enjoy greater levels of legitimacy (Miller, 2003; Davidson and Stark 2011). These potential benefits are particularly apposite within policy systems that are constituted around 'wicked' policy problems, characterised by uncertainty, controversy, competing priorities or so-called 'democratic deficits' (Stevenson and Dryzek 2012; Niemeyer 2013). In these contexts, the endogenous characteristics of a deliberative process – collective decision making, equal participation, exchange of reason and preference transformation – can bring something new to the policy analysis process. Namely, a deeper, more reflective and more contingent strand of policy evidence, that comes from the 'citizen-philosopher' who is directly engaging with policymakers about 'real world' outcomes (Niemeyer 2013).

However, the hypothesis that is driving this stream is that deliberative mechanisms can reveal, and help develop, integrative policy solutions. In this regard, citizens can use deliberative means to communicate preferences about specific forms of integration and to identify where they think the most appropriate balances should be struck within policy solutions when goals compete. Perhaps more controversially, deliberative mechanisms can also be used as a means of transforming those preferences in ways which support greater syntheses in this area (for example, Hobson and Niemeyer 2013). Thus the project will seek to road-test policy solutions through these mechanisms and, simultaneously, examine whether or not deliberative mechanisms can facilitate legitimacy for social and low-emission integration schemes.

The design for this aspect of the project relies upon the staging of a number of 'mini-publics' in the capital cities of Australia. In these forums, randomly sampled citizens will be given the chance to deliberate around the policy solutions developed in streams 1-3. The data that generated will provide insights into what integrative policy solutions are credible and how citizen attitudes might be leveraged to support synthesised goals.

## A Closer Look: the Possibilities and the Problems of Policy Discourse

Having set out the problem and the project design we can now provide a snapshot of the findings that are emerging. The discussion below is located within stream two which is operationalized through a discourse analysis of national policy and politics. A particular focus in this stream is how environmental communication fares when it enters intro pre-established policy spaces that are characterised by well embossed social and economic goals and instruments. Social-psychological studies of environmental communication can help us outline some of the challenges which face new discourses as they attempt to establish themselves.

In this regard, two contemporary trends in the climate change and communication literature are important because of their pertinence to integration. The first trend is reflected in the growing realisation that discourses that are premised exclusively on the importance of dealing with climate change, and the compelling nature of that issue in itself, are no longer enough to motivate changes in behaviour (if indeed they ever were). This view can be found across social science disciplines but is particularly well-rehearsed in social-psychological studies (Bain *et al.* 2016; Verchick 2016: 991; Osofsky and Peel 2016: 700). As one international group of psychologists has emphasised:

Those trying to motivate widespread action on climate change face two hurdles. The first is to convince enough people that climate change is real and important. The second is to move people from accepting its reality and importance to acting, both in pressuring their governments and in their personal lives. A single strategy has typically been used to overcome both hurdles: present the science and consequences of climate change in more compelling ways. This intuitive strategy was initially successful, but in many places progress has stalled or even reversed. Communicating climate science is now failing to persuade those who remain unconvinced climate change is real ... and the public priority of climate change is declining in many countries. (Bain *et al.* 2016: 154)

This is certainly the case in Australia where climate change *is* regarded as an issue and *is* linked to human activity in the perception of the public, yet it continues to be ranked as a very low priority compared to other policy concerns (Leviston *et al.* 2014: v).

The second trend in the literature that is relevant to this paper is the view that we can better understand how climate change communication strategies fail via social-psychological theories, such as Cognitive Cultural Theory or Social Identity Theory (SIT), which emphasise how scientific messages are filtered and refracted through cultural biases and the norms and values that are affiliated with group membership (Fielding *et al.* 2008; Whitmarsh and O'Neill 2010; Kahan *et al.* 2012; Unsworth and Fielding 2014). Within works of this nature, association with political and ideological phenomena is often cited as a key determinant that can colour an individual's position on climate change in ways which mean 'the science' and the technical arguments have little purchase (McCright 2010; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Hart and Nisbet 2012; Unsworth and Fielding 2014).

In the context of this paper, what is most relevant about these studies is the solutions that they propose to overcome social, cultural and politically motivated dissonance. In this regard, there is a broad consensus that scientific climate change discourses need to blend into other forms of communication in order to gain in influence. At a basic level, this means finding a way to package climate change evidence so that it can be sympathetic to the values of a group, rather than in ways that will be seen as restrictive to them (Kahan et al. 2012; Verchick 2016). For obvious reasons, this view is often discussed in terms of the ways in which climate change framing might activate and integrate into conservative values and conservative identities (Feygina et al. 2010; Unsworth and Fielding 2014). Others suggest that in order to make behavioural change more compelling, climate change needs to be sold in terms of 'co-benefits' which emphasise the economic or scientific developments that come with climate science or the social gains that can be made from behavioural change in the form of, for example, more benevolent communities (Bain et al. 2016: 156). Alternatively, arguments have been made that 'moving past imbedded partisanship and political dysfunction' requires 'refocusing regulatory efforts on areas where a greater degree of consensus may be possible' (Osofsky and Peel 2016: 696) and 'specifically, framing climate change and energy transition as a matter of economic development (as has been possible with respect to some energy efficiency and renewable energy projects) or disaster resilience (in the aftermath of high profile events like Superstorm Sandy) (ibid: 702).

What all of these strategies have in common is their emphasis on intertwining a climate change discourse into other concerns that may be better able to compel action: different policy spaces which are less controversial (disaster resilience); policy goals that are given more weight and priority amongst citizens and within policy agendas (economic development or community building); or values which affect decision making in more profound ways (ideologies and party identification). In doing so the attempt is to enhance the legitimacy of climate change goals and the persuasive capacity of climate change discourses through integration. However, there are dangers that are inherent to this strategy. A significant issue in this regard is of course that attempts to integrate climate change into established policy spaces, traditional policy goals or pre-existing discourses built on established values and norms, may create conflict and competition. We can now turn from theory to empirics and explore the possibilities and the pitfalls of one social and environmental discourse in this regard.

#### Integrating and Disintegrating Discourse: Renewable Energy and the National Electricity Market

Australia's National Electricity Market (NEM) and its recent 'energy crisis' provides an illustrative case study in which we can observe climate change and social policy discourse being merged into a pre-existing policy space. The emphasis in the analysis here is primarily on the extent to which the policy discourse around the NEM offers the possibility of effective integration of its multiple concerns, which are social (household affordability), environmental (low-emissions from providers) and economic (security, reliability, market

efficiency). The multi-dimensional nature of the NEM and its varied goals and outcomes makes it an excellent case study for an examination of integration. Moreover, the recent 'energy crisis', which has been spurred on by exponential price rises for consumers and a number of 'blackouts' in South Australia, has, in the words of Australia's Chief Scientist, presented a 'once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform the NEM' (Finkel 2016: 3). Thus the Market now sits at a critical juncture in which there is a real possibility of a change that could better integrate and institutionalise social and environmental goals and policy instruments.

However in this case we see discourse that integrates social, environmental and economic concerns together and, conversely, discourse which pulls them apart. Three arguments are presented below about the discourse and its (dis)integrating nature. First, a number of discursive practices have managed to integrate climate change and social concerns into the NEM and these reflect the possibility of integration through discourse. Second, the emergence of these concerns have encouraged the NEM to be viewed in terms of a problematic 'trilemma' of goals (energy security, affordability and low-emissions), which sit in competition with each other and require 'balancing' through prioritisation. This framing reflects the way in which discourse can disconnect environmental and social goals. Third, post-crisis, a consensus now exists about the primary goals that the NEM should facilitate, which are the security and affordability of the power supply. Here we see a discourse that underscores the mutuality of economic and social goals but excludes lowemissions. However, underneath this consensus there are meaning making contests over the role of renewable energy, its place within the NEM and the extent to which it should be pursued through policy instruments. Thus the post-crisis discourse is divided between one narrative that stresses disconnection and competition between goals and another which stresses their mutually reinforcing nature. Each of these arguments are developed below in two sections. The first outlines the development of the NEM's goals and the emergence of the 'trilemma' and the second examines the de-prioritisation of the low-emission agenda after the energy crisis and the subsequent framing contests that have ensued.

### The Integration of a Climate Discourse and the Emergence of the NEM 'Trilemma'

The National Electricity Market exists to produce market efficiency and reliability on behalf of the consumer. The Market pursues the National Electricity Objective (NEO) which states formally that the long-term interest of consumers is met through a focus upon price, quality, safety, reliability and security. The simple premise underpinning the NEO is that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between market efficiency and the socio-economic welfare of consumers. Thus in the institutional formation of the NEO and the NEM we see two goals - affordability and security - being conflated into a single market-orientated discourse, which is orientated towards the consumer and consumer benefits. These remain the formal goals of the Market and in the contemporary discourse, as we shall see below, they often remain conflated together despite the acknowledgement that 'a higher level of energy security has cost implications' (Finkel 2016: 10).

However, while the formal objectives of the NEM have remained relatively static and continue to be expressed through a market-efficiency discourse, changes in state-level practices and new discourses at both the federal and state levels have emerged. In this regard, price affordability at the household level has grown in importance and has been articulated in terms of a wider social-economic concern beyond market price. Consider, for example, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) arguments in 2015 as a response to a review of the NEM's governance arrangements:

The [NEM] objective is narrowed by reference to price, quality, safety, reliability, security of supply of electricity. Compared to international jurisdictions, this focus on the economic efficiency of electricity supply to consumers is a narrow regulatory remit. By way of comparison, the United States Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) extends to ensuring that the operation of network businesses are 'in the public interest.' This broader

scope would empower regulatory investigations regarding environmental standards, regional development and efficiency of access of demand-side participants. (PIAC 2015: 35)

And again in 2017 as a response to the current review of energy security, PIAC calls for a:

focus on a broader interpretation of the "long term consumer benefit" including appropriate weighting to emissions reduction and social objectives' because 'it would be consistent with international practice to include social and environmental objectives like affordability and focus on total cost of energy services, not merely 'price' (treated as price per unit of energy) which is just one element of consumer benefit (PIAC 2017: 18).

In such narratives we see attempts to integrate social and environmental concerns within a market discourse through concepts like 'long term consumer benefit' and the extension of 'the public interest'. Concepts such as these have integrative potential because they fuse social and environmental concerns together into a discourse that is economic and public-managerial in nature. Indeed, concepts such as these are facets of a larger market-orientated narrative that has sought to justify climate change policy in terms of economic efficiency. This discourse has facilitated the addition of emissions reduction into the NEM's suite of goals in a significant manner and it is reflected in justification of Renewable Energy Targets (RET) at the state level and in the federal government's continued (rhetorical) commitment to the COP 21 2% emission reduction target.

While this view is encouraging in terms of the possibilities for climate change to be sunken within other discourses, it has also meant that the reform challenge now tends to be crystallised in terms of three competing goals: 1) affordability for consumers, which remains a constant in all discourses and is still related to through a simple concept of price affordability; 2) security and reliability in terms of supply, which now dominate as the key elements of market efficiency; 3) a lowering of carbon emissions primarily via renewable energy. These three objectives are consistently problematized when spoken of together via a discourse that suggests that they sit in tension with each other. This is reflected in the term 'trilemma' which was originally coined by economists to describe the impossibility of achieving a fixed foreign exchange rate, free capital movement and independent monetary policy (Obstfeld et al. 2015). However, it has also been used to describe competing goals in environmental policy (Tilman et al. 2009). In the NEM reform discourse, the term is widespread. It appears in the Chief Scientist's Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market (Finkel 2016), it appears in the advocacy of think tanks around the issue (PIAC 2017), in media reporting on the South Australian electricity failures (ABC 2016) and in public intellectualism generally (Sandiford 2017). In the words of the Chief Scientist:

The heart of the Review's task is to find solutions to address the so-called energy trilemma policies that simultaneously provide a high level of energy security and reliability, universal access to affordable energy services, and reduced emissions. This is easier said than done. There is a tension between these three objectives. ... A careful balancing exercise is required. (Finkel 2016: 10, emphasis added)

What we can immediately see in this is a problematization that demands that a balance has to be struck between three competing outcomes, which cannot all be privileged equally. Thus the trilemma reflects a view that the three goals of the NEM need to be prioritised and located in a hierarchy and, consequentially, that political decision making and policy design are an exercise in modulating different objectives in a way that brings coherence. This inevitably means that certain goals and instruments need to be privileged at the expense of others. Thus the whole notion of a trilemma encourages a meaning in which (de)prioritisation needs to take place. In this regard, Bachhi's (2009: 7-13) discussion of discursive binaries is illuminating:

A binary assumes an A/not-A relationship. That is, what is on one side of a binary is considered to be excluded from the other side. In addition, there is a hierarchy implied in

binaries. One side is privileged, considered to be more important or more valued than the other side. Invariably binaries simplify complex relationships. Hence we need to watch where they appear in policies and how they function to shape the understanding of the issue (Bacchi 2009: 7, original emphasis)

#### She continues:

Since, as mentioned, binaries simplify complex experience, it is possible to indicate where this simplification distorts or misrepresents certain issues ... This kind of analysis usefully draws attention to tensions and contradictions in problem representation (Bacchi 2009: 13)

The argument that can be built upon this is that the emergence of the environmental agenda encouraged a trilemma view that now simplifies a very complex market and distorts the policy challenge into one which demands an ordering, rather than a synthesising, of goals. Moreover, it leaves the environmental goal vulnerable in the landscape of the NEM as it is the goal which is not regularly legitimised or justified. As such, it is susceptible to discourses which would seek to disconnect it from energy policy. This is exactly what has taken place in the wake of a number of blackout events in South Australia that occurred across 2016 and 2017. In response to these events, a discourse has emerged in which we see security and affordability conflated together on one side of a binary and climate change, represented via renewable energy, on the other.

### The Energy Crisis and the Disintegration of Climate and Social Objectives

In the wake of the September 2016 blackout (and the other smaller, blackout events) the Australian federal government, speaking primarily through the Minister for Environment and Energy (Josh Frydenberg) has sought to frame the causal story in terms of the damaging nature of the South Australian government's pursuit of renewable energy. The policy solution that has emerged on the back of that framing has been to reorder the NEM objectives in a way that ensures security and affordability have primacy within the trilemma at the expense of emission reduction.

This re-prioritising is apparent in changes in discourse and changes in policy. The change is best illustrated through the self-described 'breakthrough' that the Environment Minister achieves at an extraordinary Council of Australian Government (COAG) Energy Council meeting on 7 October 2016 in which the federal and state governments 'agreed that their primary responsibility is to ensure the security, reliability and affordability of the energy system' (COAG 2016: 1). The Environment Minister's press release following this meeting was quite clear that:

South Australia's recent blackout was a wake-up call that underlined the importance of energy security to all Australians. In a breakthrough meeting today COAG Energy Ministers have agreed that energy security, reliability and affordability is their primary responsibility - putting it back at number one. (DEE 2016: 1)

It is worth noting here the complementarity that is being emphasised between security, reliability and affordability in the statement above. Not only are they to be prioritised but they are also defined as a *single set* of goals. This rhetorical act places security and affordability on one side of a binary and climate change concerns on the other side as a competing objective. What we see here therefore is a piece of discourse in which social concerns in the form of affordability are disconnected from climate policy and energy market concerns in the form of security are disconnected from climate policy. This reordering has been re-emphasised in the minutes of every COAG Energy Council since and policy commitments have followed. The Council had agreed to mandate the Finkel Review into the future of the electricity market, which also re-emphasises that the 'that the security and reliability of our electricity is paramount' (Finkel 2016: 10) and the Council has also committed to fast-

tracking technical projects that will 'increase security and reliability in Australia's physical electricity system' (COAG 2017) and that 'the commerciality of projects demonstrating the capability to enhance the security and reliability of the NEM' had to be promoted (COAG 2016a: 1). In Parliament, the description of the 'breakthrough' meeting in which the commitment to security and affordability was made was attached to an argument about Labour's 'ideological' position vis-à-vis renewable energy. Thus the Minister reported to the Parliament that in the extraordinary COAG meeting:

We had a robust discussion about the aggressive state based renewable targets and the implications that they have. There was a big breakthrough at the meeting on two key points: firstly, there was an express agreement by the ministers that their primary responsibility is energy security, reliability and affordability; and, secondly, there was an agreement by ministers that there would be an independent review that would be chaired by the Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel, which would look at energy security ... Are there any challenges to this approach? The greatest challenge comes from those opposite, with their reckless pursuit of an ideological approach to renewable energy targets without thinking through the implications for energy security. (Hansard, Monday 10 October 2016: 1288)

The emphasis is quite clear. Renewable energy and energy security sit in tension and the latter needs to be privileged. This statement, however, also introduces us to the first of a number of other interesting features of the re-prioritising discourse. First, climate change policy is never directly challenged nor does it drop out of the federal discourse completely. In institutional terms the COAG minutes regularly record 'the Australian Government's commitment at Paris and the integration of climate and energy policy at the federal level' while, at the same time, emphasising security and affordability as the primary concerns (COAG 2016: 1). Indeed, the Environment Minister has often defended the Coalition's record on reducing emissions and its commitment to the Paris Agreement from the despatch box when discussing the energy crisis. For example, Hansard records the Minister telling the Parliament that the federal government:

are absolutely serious about meeting our emissions reduction targets. We are doing that through the national energy productivity plan, the Emissions Reduction Fund, the 23.5 per cent RET and a whole range of processes. But we will not compromise energy security and affordability. We will not at a federal level see the mistake of Jay Weatherill repeated and writ large. (Hansard, Thursday 23 March 2017: 3050)

Here we can see that the focus is squarely on the Opposition benches and the (Labor ran) states who have decided to pursue 50% Renewable Energy Targets while, at the same time, closing coal-fired electricity plants. In this discourse, *climate change is separated from renewable energy* so that the latter can be attacked in terms of its incompatibility with affordability and security while, at the same time, the coalition's record on climate change can be promoted.

However, the re-prioritising discourse has been resisted. Struggles over meaning have taken place, particularly between the South Australian Government and the Federal Government. In the face of criticism, for example, the state-level government has responded with a discourse of its own that has a number of features. First, it frames the federal government's 'lack of leadership' in the environmental policy space. This narrative often rotates around the Emissions Intensity Target (EIT) which is a carbon-market-like scheme in which low-emitters gain credit that can be purchased by high emitters. There is now a significant 'discourse coalition' (Hajer 1997: 58) in favour of the EIT and the South Australian Government is one large actor in that coalition. Another is the NEM regulator. In December 2016, responding to a COAG Energy Council request, AEMC published a Review into the integration of energy and emissions reduction policy and concluded that:

of the three emissions reduction mechanisms, the EIT is the mechanism likely to integrate energy and emissions reduction policies most successfully. The EIT mechanism can achieve the desired emissions reductions in a manner that maintains the reliability, security, and economic efficiency of the wholesale electricity market, at the lowest long-term cost to consumers (AEMC 2016: 54)

This encouraged the Environment Minister to suggest that an EIT would be considered as part of an internal departmental review into climate change because, in his words, 'we know that there's been a large number of bodies that have recommended an emissions intensity scheme, which is effectively a baseline and credit scheme. We'll look at that' (ABC 6 December 2016). This was rebuked by the Prime Minister and within 48 hours the Minister was forced to back-track and claim instead that 'The Turnbull Government is not contemplating such a scheme, we're not advocating for such a scheme. What we are focused on is to drive down electricity prices and to increase energy security' (Sydney Morning Herald, 6 December) and to suggest that in actual fact he 'didn't mention an emissions intensity scheme, it's not in any document that the Coalition has put out, in relation to this review' (ABC 6 December 2016). Citing affordability as the reason, the Prime Minister also emphasised that 'We will not be imposing a carbon tax and we will not be imposing an emissions trading scheme, however it is called' (ABC 6 December 2016). This is of course another example of a trilemma discourse emphasising the tension between the social (affordability) and the emironmental (an EIT). However, for the opposing discourse, it represents ammunition for a framing that suggests that internal liberal party politics and a lack of party leadership are undermining the search for a national strategy. Thus for the South Australian Government:

It is important to note that in recent years, there has been a lack of national leadership on energy policy, particularly over the question of a price on carbon. ... The South Australian Government has advocated for a national Emissions Intensity Scheme to drive investment in cleaner energy sources, such as gas and renewables. An Emissions Intensity Scheme is supported by businesses, industry groups and energy experts, but not Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, despite previous support of the policy. We therefore submit that clear national policy settings that have as their centrepiece an emissions intensity scheme are needed to guide modernisation of the electricity grid. (South Australian Government 2017: 1)

More importantly, in terms of the trilemma, is the re-emphasis of the state's commitment to renewable energy, the Paris Agreement and emissions reduction generally. In this regard the emission reduction goal is reinserted into a state-level discourse with some gusto via a specific combination of goals which are defined in terms of 'reliable, competitive and clean power' in which a 'cleaner and greener' narrative sits alongside 'reliability and affordability' in a much bolder fashion (South Australian Government 2017a). Thus in the state-level discourse climate change is clearly integrated alongside security and affordability. Indeed, those goals can only be understood through an understanding of renewable energy and narratives about its benefits in terms of economic growth (jobs) reductions in affordability (the social agenda) and a very clear environmental rationale that is explicitly referencing climate change:

Around the world, trillions of dollars are being invested in renewable energy. This is because renewable energy is fast becoming the cheapest way to invest in new electricity generation, and it does not create pollution that causes global warming. In Australia, the Federal Government, by agreeing to the international agreement on climate change, known as the Paris Agreement, has committed Australia to producing energy, in ways that do not cause pollution, by the middle of this century. With its abundant natural resources, South Australia has been leading Australia's efforts to clean up the electricity sector. The state's energy comes from a mix of renewable energy and gas, which produces much less pollution

than electricity generated from coal. Renewable energy is also good for jobs and the economy. (South Australian Government 2017a: 12)

In this argument price reduction, economic growth and emission reduction can all be achieved through a shift towards renewables. What we are seeing here therefore is an integrating discourse that is attempting to re-connect economic efficiency and rationality to climate change from a greener perspective. Like the federal discourse, this can also be linked to some significant reforms that are being driven by the new plan, including: the creation of Australia's largest battery storage facility; the creation of a stand-by gas powered electricity plant for emergencies; incentives for more gas use to avoid reliance on coal-fired generators in Victoria; and the establishment of a new security target that will require more 'locally generated, cleaner, secure energy to be used in South Australia' (South Australian Government 2017a: 3). While this division remains, the integration of the NEM into a coherent whole in which social and environmental policy are properly synthesised seems highly unlikely.

#### Conclusion

What the case study shows is that there is the possibility of integrating the economic, the social and the environmental through discourse and that this can lead to institutional policy change. However, what we have also observed is that in the context of this regulatory market space, discourses consistently promote social and economic concerns while the environmental agenda is championed sporadically and, at times, ambiguously (via the proxy of renewables). In order to change this the reviews of energy policy, many of which are ongoing, need to strongly promote a public good concern with low emissions into the current market dominated discourse. The tension between protecting vested economic interests around fossil fuels and protecting the natural environment highlights what Jackson (2009) refers to as the 'conflicted state', where the role of the state to ensure that long-term public goods are protected is frequently undermined by short-term private interests in pursuit of continuous economic growth. The macro-economic pressure to pursue growth is felt most acutely at the national level, thus we are likely to see the growth of a state-federal disconnection in which different elements of the 'trilemma' are promoted in different ways depending on the level of government, and the internal politics of elected governments. As Richard Dennis (2017) states in his assessment of the changing discourse of the Prime Minister on energy policy:

Despite having once helped launch a plan to make Australia 100% renewable, Turnbull had lost interest in renewable energy. After settling into the big chair he apparently came to realise that coal was good for humanity, that renewable energy was unreliable and that the ALP's support for a 50% renewable energy target was proof that they were "ideological". We are told that such views help to appease the right of his party.

The combination of competing industry interests, conflicting principles and competitive federalism would suggest that creating synergy between economic, social and environmental goals will continue to be a challenge into the foreseeable future in Australia.

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